# Coordinators' Judgement of IDRC Support Strong and reliable

March 2006

In 2006, IDRC completed a wide-ranging evaluation of the support it gave to research networks during the decade 1995-2005. This assessment included a review of IDRC's documentation, interviews with key players, a learning forum, and a telephone and e-mail questionnaire survey addressed to hundreds of network coordinators and members.

Among its findings, this survey generated information from 110 coordinators about the relationship between IDRC and the 80 networks it supported during this period, the kind of help IDRC provided, and suggestions for improving this support.

## PRESENT AT THE CREATION

Among the networks surveyed, IDRC was involved with 90 per cent of them when those networks started; that is, IDRC played a significant role in getting them launched.

Geographic focus was a factor. Among networks concentrating on South Asia, IDRC was involved with every one at the beginning. In the case of networks with a worldwide interest, however, only three-quarters had IDRC links at the time of their establishment.

Almost half the networks in the sample first connected with IDRC after 2000, and one-fifth only since 2003. Eastern and Southern African networks were more likely than those from other regions to have made their initial association with IDRC in recent years.
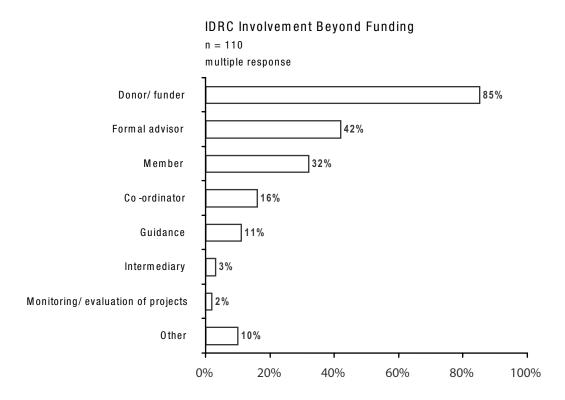
Over the course of the decade, the duration of IDRC involvement was one to two years in about one-third of the networks, and three to five years in another one-third.

At the conclusion of the study period in 2005, IDRC remained engaged with almost two-thirds of the networks. Regarding it another way, almost one-fifth disengaged from IDRC during the last five years. The networks most likely to have disengaged during this time were those focusing on Latin America and the Caribbean.

## MORE THAN MONEY

In nine out of ten networks investigated, IDRC was either "very" or "somewhat" involved in ways other than funding. It would appear that IDRC's link at the time of start-up informed the intensity of the long-term relationship: almost all South Asian networks report IDRC being "very" involved, while only about half of those with a global focus do so.

IDRC played a surprisingly wide range of roles in the networks it supported. Here follows a breakdown (the 110 coordinator responses were weighted to reflect the 80 networks they represented):

**IDRC Involvement Beyond Funding**

n = 110

multiple response

| Category | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|
| Donor/ funder | 85% |
| Formal advisor | 42% |
| Member | 32% |
| Co-ordinator | 16% |
| Guidance | 11% |
| Intermediary | 3% |
| Monitoring/ evaluation of projects | 2% |
| Other | 10% |

IDRC's precise role was related somewhat to each network's program area. Natural resource management networks, for example, are more likely to report that IDRC was an advisor, while those concentrating on social and economic policy tend overwhelmingly to say that IDRC functioned as donor (that is, providing non-monetary resources) or funder.

Again, geography was a significant factor. For instance, IDRC was more likely to be a co-ordinator in networks attending to the Middle East and North Africa and to South East Asia. And among networks with a global rather than regional focus, just over half report that IDRC was a formal member – far more than in other types of networks.

Age mattered too. Another striking finding was that, among networks created before 1995 – that is, before the start of the study period – every last one reports that IDRC was a donor or funder.
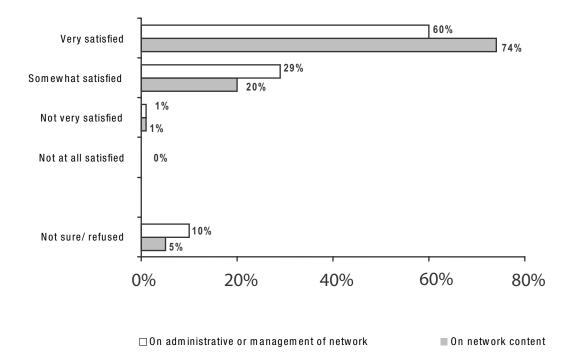
Overall, the funding environment was quite crowded. Networks received money from over 20 different organizations, including IDRC.

The congested funding community may have been one factor in the unexpected finding that some 15 per cent of respondents report that IDRC was neither donor nor funder – even though the only networks included in the survey were those that had received IDRC support. According to the survey team, this result may have come about because of faulty memory on the part of some respondents who are reporting on events many years ago, because IDRC's financial support may have been eclipsed by greater funding from other donor agencies, or simply because the question was misunderstood.

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

In just over half the networks analyzed, the frequency of interaction with IDRC was "a few times a year," both on network content and on administrative and management issues.

Here's how networks respond when asked whether they were satisfied with the level or intensity of IDRC's involvement:

| | |
|---|---|
| Very satisfied | 60% / 74% |
| Somewhat satisfied | 29% / 20% |
| Not very satisfied | 1% / 1% |
| Not at all satisfied | 0% |
| Not sure/ refused | 10% / 5% |

☐ On administrative or management of network   ▨ On network content

Regardless of the type of issues under discussion, networks with a focus on economic policy (70 per cent being "very" satisfied) and social policy (62 per cent) were happier with IDRC's support than those concentrating on information, communication, and technology (41 per cent).

## SOLID SUPPORT ON CONTENT

Most networks testify to receiving strong backing from IDRC in a range of substantive areas: research dissemination, networking and partnerships, research design and implementation, and promoting the use of research.

One compelling finding was that over half the networks enjoyed IDRC assistance in not one but in two or three of these areas, and nearly one-fifth got help in all four. Clearly, IDRC's support for network content was broad and multi-dimensional.

Other details came to light. For example, newer networks cite greater levels of IDRC assistance with the design of research than do older networks. And South Asian networks stand apart from groups in other regions because of the extensive IDRC help they received with networking and partnership issues.

In general, appreciation for IDRC support for network content was extremely high. Fully 98 per cent of networks report being either "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the help they received for research design and implementation. The lowest level of satisfaction was 90 per cent, for assistance in the dissemination of research.

The only anomaly was the area of professional development, where fewer networks report involvement with IDRC. While overall satisfaction rates were high, at 93 per cent, only 38 per cent were "very" satisfied.

## FEW COMPLAINTS

Coordinators were asked to suggest ways that IDRC could improve its support for networks.

Concerning administration and management, at least half the networks either have no suggestions, or are unsure how support could be improved. This result confirmed the general finding that networks have been pretty happy with IDRC's involvement.

Among the few areas cited for improvement were communication and information-sharing, and funding – that is, more of what IDRC had already been doing well. Specific suggestions were for more learning projects, fewer IDRC staff changes, and better "virtual tools" for network facilitation.

Concerning network content, the pattern is similar. Over 40 per cent of networks have no suggestions, or else are unsure, and close to one-quarter mention increased communication as being desirable.

One specific recommendation was that IDRC should include more information on its own website related to the networks it supports, with hyperlinks to them.

Two categories of coordinators call for specific improvements: those who work for international organizations highlighted the need for increased funding, and those with doctorate degrees mentioned the need for better communication.